

Diving in Ambergris Caye

Ambergris Caye is the perfect location to access Belize's best diving spots like the Great Blue Hole, Lighthouse Reef and the Hol Chan Marine Reserve.

Highlights

Hol Chan Marine Reserve

The Hol Chan Marine Reserve, established in 1979, leads divers through a cut in the Belize Barrier Reef, resulting in colorful marine life encounters.

Shark Ray Alley

Traditionally, this was where fishermen cleaned their catch. Nurse sharks and rays were attracted to the area and have been coming ever since.

The Blue Hole

The most famous of Belize's dive sites, this strange geological structure welcomes divers inside its circular depths, reaching 400 feet (124m) deep.

Belize Barrier Reef

In addition to numerable Caribbean fish species, reef sharks and turtles, Belize's barrier reef is home to the endemic whitespotted toadfish.

Quick facts

The appeal of Ambergris Caye as the main diving destination in Belize is that it lies close to the world's largest blue hole and the Belize Barrier Reef System, a 186-mile (300km) portion of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System.

While the Blue Hole should only be dived by those with an advanced certification due to its depth, the Belize Barrier Reef is perfect for beginners. Little to no current passes over the bright coral reefs, ensuring stress-free diving.

There are many dive operators to choose from on the island but if you like a quieter dive holiday, you can also dive from Caye Caulker. The majority of dives from either Caye are conducted by small to mid-size motorized boats. Another option is to explore the area on a liveaboard diving vessel to see more of the other islands and atolls.

For divers headed to the Blue Hole, a \$40 per day park fee must be paid before diving.

When to go

Diving at Ambergris Caye is possible year-round but do keep an eye on hurricane forecasts from July to September. Summer months offer optimal conditions.

August to October

The wet season falls from August to October. These months tend to be the warmest with average temperatures around 82 or 84°F (28 or 29°C). The wet season also offers the best surface conditions, ensuring that all sites are accessible. Rainfall, while prevalent during these months, will only impact a few hours of the day. This means that most of the day will be sunny rather than rainy. More importantly, visibility may decrease due to runoff from nearby rivers.

October and November is grouper mating season. Thousands of these fish descend on the cayes to mate and give birth to their young.

August to October is considered low season for tourism and diving in Belize. However, the diving is only slightly impacted by the rain and many

would argue that this is the best time to dive in Belize. You'll find fewer crowds and the best deals during these months.

November to July

The drier of the two seasons is from November to July. These months bring slightly cooler temperatures above and below the water. However, temperatures will only drop by a couple of degrees and most divers are still comfortable in a shorty. Surface conditions can become choppy at this time, creating limited access to the more exposed sites. With that said, from November to July, you can expect little to no rain and excellent visibility.

April to June is considered the best time to dive in Belize.

These months also coincide with peak season, so you can expect more fellow visitors than during wet season.

Snorkeling in Ambergris Caye

The Belize Barrier Reef is perfect for snorkelers. You'll be able to access many of the same areas as divers do with the help of a snorkeling tour. These are easily arranged through any operator on Ambergris Caye. At Shark Ray Alley, you'll also be able to get close to stingrays and nurse sharks.

Best dive sites in Ambergris Caye

There is a great variety of dive sites from shallow coral gardens to steep walls as well as canyons, channels, seagrass beds, and mangrove sites.

Diving the Great Blue Hole is an absolute must but do note that it is a deep dive. You have to go beyond 100ft (30m) to see the cave and its formations (max depth 130ft). The caves are spectacular! Other areas that must be visited include Lighthouse Reef, Turneffe Atoll, and the Hol Chan

Marine Reserve which is just off Ambergris Caye. Wherever you dive, visibility is likely to stretch beyond 100ft (30m).

What to see

The large creatures often spotted during dives are friendly nurse sharks, stingrays, spotted eagle rays, and green sea turtles. Nurse sharks around Ambergris Caye are known to be rather inquisitive so don't be alarmed to see them coming up really close. Besides that, there are many lobsters, damsel fish, barracuda and trevally.

Around seagrass beds near the mangrove swamps, see queen conch, juvenile fish and also juvenile lobsters or a critically endangered manatee. Around the atolls, Nassau grouper are common and you can find some critters like nudibranch, green moray eels and lots of basslets.

Ambergris Caye is part of Belize and lies right at the southernmost tip of the Yucatán Peninsula. The largest island of Belize, it measures 25 miles (40km) in length and 1 mile (1.6km) in width. The main town is San Pedro and because the island is so small, most people get around on golf carts.

Originally inhabited by a Mayan civilization, the island was only discovered by Europeans in the early 16th century and similar to many islands in the Caribbean, was a popular pirate hideaway in the 17th to 18th century.

Other attractions

The island used to be known for its coconut production before World War II and lobsters after the war. Tourism blossomed in the 1980's and today, people flock to Ambergris Caye for scuba diving, snorkeling, and simply to enjoy island life.

Non-divers can head out on snorkel trips and get to swim with nurse sharks and stingrays. Spear fishing is popular here but only while free

diving. Besides that, soak up the island life, eat seafood, relax on beaches or rent a bicycle to explore the area.

Getting there

Fly to San Pedro Airport on a short 15 minute flight from Belize on Maya Island Air or Tropic Air. There are also water taxis available from Belize City. Once on the island, you can use the ever-present golf carts to get around or the power of your own two feet. Boats are always available to ferry you to nearby reefs.